New School Assignment

Mexican Whiteboy

by Matt DeLa Peña

Meta Analysis based on the theme: Discovering the Truth

Submitted by Danielle Crump

*Discovering the Truth* is the central theme in Mexican Whiteboy, by Matt DeLa Peña. Several characters are trying to figure out who they are and how they fit into a world filled with little inspiration and chaos. Danny’s character suffers the most, as he struggles with issues of identity and brokenness which contribute to the evolution of his character. Throughout the novel, he self-doubts, and daily works through the emotional pain of inadequacy. Despite feelings of isolation and not having any positive role models, he wants more for himself. The collage that I created captures images that represent key events on his journey. The images represent isolation, self-harm, betrayal, good vs. evil, and more.

One of the most difficult challenges Danny faces is feeling that he does not fit in with the Mexican side of his family, nor the White. The image I chose to represent the emotional division he feels is the grey and white sculpture of a male with two heads. The sculpture has a clear dividing line to represent Danny’s bi-racial status, and the severed head represents the psychological turmoil he feels. Danny desperately wants to fit in, but he is not like his familia from el barrio. He doesn’t even speak Spanish. The author shares that, “all Danny ever wanted to be was a pair of Grandma’s worn-out house slippers”, but he is considered an outsider (Peña 47). Danny is like that awkward relative that everyone loves, but makes fun of at family functions.

As a result of the pressure he feels to fit in, and the uncertainty of the future, Danny resorts to self-mutilation. He digs his fingernails into his skin to the point where the skin tears and bleeds. At first, the author subtly reveals this to the reader, but as the novel progresses, it is clear what Danny is doing. To represent this, I included a Wordle with key words that include: self-harm, pain, abuse, disorder, problem, and danger. In addition to the Wordle, I included the image of a ring of hand-holding individuals representing family, with one person standing on the outside, representing Danny. The contrast in colors also further emphasizes the disconnect between he and his family. Danny wants to evolve into something better than what he is, but first you have to fully understand who you are as a person. He is not there yet. For much of the novel, confusion lingers like a thin midst hovering over National City.

Mexican Whiteboy’s traditional coming of age theme expands to supporting characters like Uno and Sofe. Throughout the novel, the question of *Who am I?* is inferred. For Danny, the questions seem endless. Why did my father really leave my family? Will I ever fit in to the Mexican side of the family? Will I ever stop choking when I’m playing ball? Will I raise the $500 needed to relocate? Will Liberty and I every hook-up? Will I ever be accepted in my private high school? For now, uncertainty is Danny’s best friend.

To complicate matters further, Danny is trying to survive in the poverty stricken area of National City, CA. One of the most engaging scenes in the novel is when he and Uno are holding onto the beams beneath the roaring train and they absorb its strength. The power to endure is implied and the young boys are becoming young men. To symbolize strength and endurance I selected the image of a train moving at top speed. Despite their surroundings, Danny and Uno feel unstoppable and they are ready to take on life’s challenges. They are starting to mature into men.

As Danny’s character evolves, more and more truth is revealed, particularly with family secrets. Secrets are abounding, and eventually, the truth comes out. Danny finds out his father used to verbally and physically abuse his mother. Later, he finds out his father is in jail and almost beat a man to death while in prison. The man he thinks is a scout is really a friend of his father who has committed to watching out for him. The truth devastates Danny, but even more hurtful is the fact that his family did not tell him the truth. To help represent feelings of betrayal, I chose the image of the two faced female with one side of her face representing the good in people, and the dark, bleeding side with sunken eyes, representing evil. The black, grey, and white tones add to the coldness of this image, which reflects Danny’s emotional state at various times in the story.

In addition to the sculpture, I included a dead bolt lock, with a rusted padlock connected to a warped wooden door. This is attached to a stone wall that is broken and chipped in certain places. The bolt slides through a thin metal strip that secures the door in place. This image piqued my interest because it was unappealing to the eye. It has a rough, rusty surface along with broken parts and uneven layers. I also noticed the thinness of the metal bracket that the bolt is placed through. Just as family secrets cause brokenness and heavy burdens, so too is the image in the collage. I also recognized the weakness in the lock and it made me reflect on how family secrets may seem impenetrable, but sometimes they are exposed by a small, thin slip of communication. Sometimes, you wish it were all a dream.

But Danny’s life is not a dream. He is living in a poor area of California that is filled with uneducated, hard- working, blue collar workers. His key out of the barrio is baseball, but he has to overcome family issues and his fears of inadequacy in order to be successful. For now, the goal is raising $500. Ironically it is Senior who later makes a comment to Uno regarding money that turns out to foreshadow events in Danny’s life. He says, “Money ain’t nothing but a rabbit in a hat…It’s an illusion” (Peña 161). For Danny, raising the five hundred dollars is the magical ingredient needed to turn his life around, but it is an illusion.

Each experience of disillusionment is followed by a “dig” in his skin. Despite the setbacks, he is on a mission to discover the truth, particularly the truth about his father. When the scout finally answers his questions, he is in shock. The unknown is what helps to make this novel engaging. As in most young adult novels, there is balance between the good and the evil. Although Danny’s dad has a violent, dark, past, he still symbolizes hope for Danny. Danny knows that his Dad loves him, and because of that, the father is a source of inspiration.

Danny’s journey for the truth regarding his family, himself as a young man, and his place in this world, is not an easy one. His character evolves through each experience, leaving the reader with a sense of hope. In the accompanying collage, a picture of a hand-held glass with the words HOPE engraved on the outside, and a flickering flame on the inside is included. The hand symbolizes the support that Danny will get on his path to success. The flame symbolizes life, strength, and power. I also included the image of a young boy standing on the horizon, looking at the endless possibilities represented in the heavens. Danny is unable to change the actions of others, but he can make decisions that lead to a positive future. His character does not come full circle, but the reader is left with the impression that his future is bright.